

## "Space Acquisition Needs Reform"

"Space Acquisition Needs Reform"

Congressman Terry Everett

Chairman of House Armed Services Subcommittee

on Strategic Forces

(Published in Aviation Week and Space Technology)

May 30, 2005

Today, our armed forces face a new combat environment and emerging threats that compel a transformation of our combat capabilities and doctrine. Development of military weapon systems, especially space programs, are challenging by nature and therefore require skilled attention in order to achieve success. However, countless acquisition programs have been anything but successful, experiencing exploding budgets and protracted schedules. We should not have to choose between the transformation of our armed forces and the need to control the runaway train of acquisitions failures.

This has been especially evident in the area of space. Over the past decade, space systems like MILSTAR, SBIRS, and EELV, just to name a few, have been plagued by repeated cost overruns and schedule delays. Previous attempts at acquisition reform in the 1990's appeared to have caused more harm than good. Moreover, the Department of Defense has not effectively enforced the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act which has allowed the skills of both government acquisitions personnel and the industrial workforce to degrade.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Defense Science Board (Young Panel) echoed these concerns and highlighted systemic problems leading to multiple space acquisition failures. These include: reliance on immature technology; overdependence on the contractor for program management; and a lack of government systems engineering and cost analysis expertise.

Despite the fact that numerous problems have been identified within the acquisition process, the Air Force continues to initiate space programs that accept extreme levels of technology risk using transformation as justification. Congress recognizes the need for transformation, but believes that transformation must include the re-evaluation of our business practices.

It is important to note that future capabilities proposed by current space programs are necessary and must be fielded for the warfighter. But, those capabilities are too important to develop in haste. The development must occur at a slower pace until the acquisition system is improved to handle increased risk.

Executing Congress' oversight role, the House Armed Services Committee is not confident the current acquisition system can accommodate the risk associated with leaps to revolutionary technology. The acquisition and management practices, as well as industry standards and quality control, must be vastly improved and, in some cases, completely rebuilt before the country should attempt to achieve the transformational capabilities at the pace currently planned. Once these systemic shortfalls are addressed by implementing the recommendations of the Congress, the GAO, and the Young Panel, then and only then, should the Department push the envelope on technology and risk for its military space systems.

Congress has stepped forward seeking to address the problems of the space acquisition system. The recently passed National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 encourages the Air Force to pursue proper corrective action that will restore confidence in the accuracy of cost estimates, focus space cadre efforts on the acquisitions workforce, and restructure programs to moderate risk and provide long-term stability.

Crucial to improving the execution of the acquisition process are the men and women in our workforce. Accordingly, our bill aims to build personnel systems, develop government system's engineering capabilities, revamp cost analysis skills, address cultural issues, and strengthen the technical expertise required for a quality acquisition workforce. Additionally, the Air Force must realize that placing operations personnel in acquisitions positions will not fix the problems that acquisitions programs experience. Only greater investment and the nurturing of an experienced acquisition corps will remedy what ails the system.

We are at a crossroads. If left unchecked, the status quo will put our national security at risk through the breakdown of the government structures and industrial base required to produce the technology desperately needed to win the war on terror. However, embracing the aforementioned alternatives will provide more capability to the warfighter sooner, and do so in a more cost effective manner. It is my sincere hope that the Air Force heeds the call for change. I look forward to working with the Air Force leadership to address these issues and keep America on the cutting edge of technology and innovation.